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Abstract

This essay addresses Virginia Woolf's personal stand in her answer to "women can't paint, women can't write", a reflection on the Victorian prejudice of the role of women in the family and society shared by both her parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen. By bridging a close textual analysis with the most recent psychological critical analysis, I argue that apart from the political, social and artistic implications, Woolf's attitude to the Victorian stereotypes related to gender roles carry a deeply personal message, being undeniably influenced and determined by the relationship with her parents and her need to lie to rest some unresolved issues concerning her status as a woman artist. This essay focuses on Woolf's 1926 novel, *To the Lighthouse*, which is, undoubtedly, her most autobiographical novel. Lily Briscoe, the unmarried painter who finally manages to conceptualize Woolf's vision at the end of the novel, has a double mission in this novel. First, she has to resolve her own insecurities and come to peace with the memory of the deceased Mrs. Ramsay, a symbol of the Victorian woman and Julia Stephen's artistic alter ego. Second, she has to connect with Mr. Ramsay and prove to herself that women can, indeed, paint. As she matures as a painter Virginia Woolf is overcoming her anger and frustration caused by the fact that she didn't not fit into the generally accepted pattern of the woman's role in society and in the family life, and especially of the status of women as artists. By creating one of the most challenging novels of the English Literature, Virginia Woolf also proves to herself and to the readers that women can, indeed write.

Keywords: gender, art, Victorian prejudices, Virginia Woolf

Being one of the earliest and most influential feminist writers of the 20th century, Virginia Woolf has offered us with a literary heritage exploring in different forms such themes as socioeconomic processes of occupational segregation, wage discrimination, imposition of separate spheres and social exclusion. Her implied perspective on distributive gender justice nourish her novels and diaries, but no other piece of fiction reflects more faithfully her deeply personal stand in this regard as *To the Lighthouse* (1926), a novel which marked her as a mature, self-fulfilled modern writer. This essay addresses Virginia Woolf's personal stand in her answer to "women can't paint, women can't write" (Woolf , *To the Lighthouse*, 48), a reflection on the Victorian prejudice of the role of women in the family and society shared by both her parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen. By bridging a close textual analysis with the most recent psychological critical analysis, I argue that apart from the political, social and artistic implications, Woolf's

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attitude to the Victorian stereotypes related to gender roles carry a deeply personal message, being undeniably influenced and determined by the relationship with her parents and her need to lie to rest some unresolved issues concerning her status as a woman artist. Lily Briscoe, the unmarried painter who finally manages to conceptualize Woolf's vision at the end of the novel, has a double mission in this novel. First, she has to resolve her own insecurities and come to peace with the memory of the deceased Mrs. Ramsay, a symbol of the Victorian woman and Julia Stephen's artistic alter ego. Second, she has to connect with Mr. Ramsay and prove to herself that women can, indeed, paint.

Lily Brsicoe – the struggling female artist

In the first section of the book Lily Briscoe is far from being the visionary artist whose prophetical "I have had my vision" (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 209) accomplishes the symbolical trip to the Lighthouse and marks the end of the novel. In "The Window" Lily is presented as a young, inexperienced painter struggling to overcome her own insecurities: "She could have wept. It was bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad! She could have done it differently of course; the colour could have been thinned and faded; the shapes etherealised; that was how Paunceforte would have seen it" (27). As she was struggling to find her own vision, to see "the colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral" Lily finds it extremely difficult to focus on her canvas because of Mr Tansley whispering in her ear, "Women can't paint, women can't write ..." (78).

Lily Briscoe is looking for images to inspire her and she inevitably turns to Mrs. Ramsay, whose hear stored up knowledge and wisdom (50). She is then recalling, leaning her head on Mrs Ramsay's knee, her insistence "that she must, Minta must, they all must marry, since in the whole world whatever laurels might be tossed to her (…), or triumphs won by her (…), and here she saddened, darkened, and came back to her chair, there could be no disputing this: an unmarried woman (…), an unmarried woman has missed the best of life (50). Lily's attitude to this statement is first, defensive, as she is trying to enumerate things that has in life, things that make her happy: "Oh, but, Lily would say, there was her father; her home; even, had she dared to say it, her painting" (51). Even though "all this seemed so little, so virginal, against the other", Lily would still "urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it", as she realizes that in fact "she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that; and so have to meet a serious stare from eyes of unparalleled depth, and confront Mrs Ramsay's simple certainty (…) that her dear Lily, her little Brisk, was a fool" (51).

Writing as Woolf's psychoanalytic catharsis

Numerous literary critics like Spilka, Abel, Kavaler-Adler, Leaska, Maze and Panken have signaled the fact that Virginia Woolf's personal life and her work were inseparable, and part of that life was inscribed in every novel she wrote. Characters, settings and conflicts present in her fiction more than commonly overlap with the world of her own experience or are reflected in Woolf's major symbols and leitmotifs, especially in her most autobiographical novel *To the Lighthouse*. Apart from the themes of life and death, the effect of time on human memory, writing as a cathartic experience, male versus female dichotomy, the theme of the role of art and the artistic vision in the

post Victorian epoch are a deeply personal ones for Virginia Woolf, themes which shaped her as a writer and inspired her feminist views on the political, social and artistic levels. Rooted deep into her most personal memories, Woolf's struggle with the Victorian prejudices on the role of women in the society and in family life are touched upon with a specific vehemence and bitterness, as she had to confront and deal, in this regard, with the two of the major constellations reverberating throughout her life, which appear in the psychological or metaphorical substance of her autobiographical writings, as well as in her fiction– her parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen.

In *Granite and Rainbow – The Hidden Life of Virginia Woolf*, Mitchell Leaska claims that "the art of fiction provided Virginia Woolf with the means of reuniting and reconciling those warring factions she felt so acutely within. (…)Writing novels permitted her to externalize much of what, locked within, might have remained dissonant, fragmentary, and devastating. It might also be said that Virginia turned instinctively to fiction because there were satisfactions in fantasy that she couldn't find in the real world" (7). A closer look at Woolf's vision on the role of the female artist in the 1920s is possible when analyzing her fictional alter ago – Lily Briscoe, the spinster painter who helped to voice her most urgent need – the urge to create art and put on the canvas, just like she did on paper, in order to make out of that vision something permanent something immune from change.

While designing the plot of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf had announced that the production of her text constitutes for her a sort of "psychoanalytic catharsis" (Abel 46). The close involvement of the author's whole being with that past is further confirmed by the liberating function ascribed by Virginia Woolf herself to her book, when on the ninety-sixth anniversary of her father's birth she writes: " I used to think of him and mother daily: but writing the *Lighthouse* laid them in my mind. (…) (I believe this to be true-that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; and, writing of them was a necessary act) "(135). The fact that writing proved to be an effective cathartic tool is supported by Woolf's statement in *A Sketch of the Past*: "Until I wrote it out, I would find my lips moving; I would be arguing with him; raging against him; saying to myself all that I never said to him ... things it was impossible to say aloud" (108). Lily Briscoe is one of the characters who assisted Woolf in saying to herself and to the reader what was impossible to say aloud for a woman in the Victorian society.

Woolf's reaction to the Victorian Woman – thinking back to Julia Stephen

In *Virginia Woolf and The Lust of Creation*, Panken states that there are four major constellations reverberating throughout Woolf's life, Virginia Woolf's relation to he mother being one of the most influential in her work. Being a perfect wife and mother of her children according to her husband, Julia Stephen was a perfect embodiment of the Victorian woman, whose life was centered upon her husband and children, filled with charity work and household duties. A rebel herself, an independent woman writer in the times when Victorian values still prevailed in the society, Virginia Woolf had, of course, to face and deal with that image. The Victorian housewife / Modern female writer conflict is resolved in a less dramatic manner in *To the Lighthouse* than in any other Woolf's novel. She chooses to reconcile with the conflict memories of her past and use this compromise as a tool to strengthen her vision as a writer.

Despite the lack of her husband's education and philosophical sight, even if she "cared not a fig for her painting" (*To the Lighthouse* 49), Mrs. Ramsay, Julia Stephen's fictional counterpart, offers a rather deep and insightful portrait of Lily Briscoe: "With Lily it was different. She faded, under Minta's glow; became more inconspicuous than ever, in her little grey dress with her little puckered face and her little Chinese eyes. Everything about her was so small. Yet, thought Mrs Ramsay, comparing her with Minta, as she claimed her help (…) of the two, Lily at forty will be the better" (104). What she liked about Lily, was the fact that she had "a thread of something; a flare of something; something of her own". Despite her appreciation of Lily's uniqueness, Mrs. Ramsay is still afraid that "no man would" and, as an unmarried woman, she might miss the best in life (104). Lily appears bitterly to accept society's brutal, age-old assumption that an independent, unmarried, non-subservient woman like herself is "not a woman" at all but rather a desiccated and useless subspecies, an "old maid." White writes that "the addition of the word "presumably" in Lily's thoughts gives her leeway to reject and cast off the social expectations that are prompting her to give herself over, like an Angel in the House, in sympathy to Mr. Ramsay. Lily's mature sense of humor enables her to distance herself from the impasse and resolve it" (100).

The question Lily Briscoe raises here is: what is best in life for a woman: what she chooses or what the society imposes her because of her gender? Does a woman have to give up her artistic vision in favor of becoming a perfect wife and mother? Does a woman miss the best in life if she chooses not to confront to these prejudices? Her answer is, as nothing is certain in this world, no marriage can promise a sublime happiness; no Victorian moral or standard can actually guarantee happiness. Art, on the other hand, is immune from change, it can capture the essence of those intense moments of vision, it can transcend time and human life, it has the power to satisfy such a restless searching soul as Virginia Woolf's, and Lily Briscoe will help us realize this by the end of the novel.

Woolf's personal vision of Women as Artists: the personal versus the artistic dichotomy

The women versus artist dichotomy is furthermore explored in the first section of the novel, "To the Lighthouse", "here was Lily, at forty-four, wasting her time, unable to do a thing, standing there, playing at painting, playing at the one thing one did not play at", and as she thinks that " one can't waste one's time at forty-four" (160). Maze writes about how Lily Briscoe intentionally represents the author as an adult, because "in the crucial third section, "The Lighthouse," as she stands painting, Lily is intent on analyzing her own feelings towards the Ramsays just as Woolf was doing for herself in the writing" (86). Maze's arguments are the following: Lily is the same age as Woolf was when writing the book; at first Lily wonders why she did not grieve for the dead Mrs. Ramsay and then she is represented as suddenly achieving grief, as Woolf thought she should herself; and finally Lily is struggling to complete a painting in which Mrs. Ramsay's absence from her familiar place is somehow the focal point, just as Woolf was struggling to achieve a resolution of her novel on the same theme: "Painting and novel are completed at the same instant" (86). Guiget also supports this claim by writing that "the essential thing that lies behind the appearances and the superficial individualities of Lily

Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay is derived not from Julia Stephen or the painter Vanessa, but from Virginia Woolf herself" (178). Briggis states that "Lily's experiences as a modernist artist struggling to express her vision recapitulate Woolf's efforts to complete her novel. She linked herself verbally with Lily when she wrote of 'brisking, after my lethargy'. Lily, like her author, makes up scenes while she is working, and, like her author, she is 'tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past" (178). Lily is thirty-three as the novel opens in mid-September, shortly before the first World War-a year or so older than Virginia in the fall of 1913. She is cast as a friend of the Ramsay family, and is said to love the whole family; but like Virginia, she has lost a mother, and her affections for Mrs. Ramsay-like Virginia's affections for older women after her mother's death-are especially intense. In the last section of the book the reader witnesses Lily grieving openly for Mrs. Ramsay some ten years after her death-which would be in 1924, about the time Virginia Woolf conceived this novel.

By portraying Lily Brsicoe, the struggling artist, who had failed to become herself a mother, a wife, a lover, Virginia Woolf stresses the fact that art would assist her in compensating all of the above. White writes that "outwardly timid, awkward, and unprepossessing, Lily carefully guards the secret of how much her art means to her (86). She tosses off a "little insincerity" when she tells Mr. Bankes that "she would always go on painting, because it interested her" (72), but three times during the dinner party scene-once when Tansley offends her, once when she decides to abandon her experiment; not to be "nice" to him, and once when she is disturbed by the presence of the engaged couple-Lily's thoughts turn to her art as a means of emotional survival. Lily wonders as she paints, going on to speculate that she, had Mrs. Ramsay lived, might have ended up married to William Bankes. "Mrs. Ramsay had planned it. Perhaps, had she lived, she would have compelled it" (175), and marriage, as Lily sees it, would have put an end to her painting. To assure herself that Mrs. Ramsay's vision for her was unwise, Lily calls up a number of witnesses. First, her quite satisfactory relationship with William Bankes as it is, not as his wife but as an affectionate friend. Second, the failure of Paul and Minta's marriage, in which Mrs. Ramsay had placed so much hope. In contemplating how life has changed and about what time has done to the Rayleys, Mrs. Ramsay's prime exhibit in the marriage arcade. Their coming together was among the triumphs celebrated at the dinner ten years before. Yet, we are told, in a metaphor that carries a special meaning in this book, that "things had worked loose after the first year or so; the marriage had turned out rather badly" (173). What Lily is implying is, I think, to remember that marriage is not time-proof. Lily tells us how separate and bitter the Rayleys' lives have become, how they went through a phase of misery and violence, and are now "excellent friends" but no longer "in love." All these serve to strengthen Lily's belief that she has everything she needs in life, her art mostly, as she imagines saying to her: "It has all gone against your wishes. They're happy like that; I'm happy like this. Life has changed completely. At that all her being, even her beauty, became for a moment, dusty and out of date" (175). Realizing her own values in life, her priorities and her concerns, Lily gets free from the influence Mrs. Ramsay had upon her, an influence representing the Victorian concept of women and their role in the society.

Lily's struggle against the Victorian prejudices, as well as Woolf's feminist stand in the other novels, has a wider, political and social meaning. *To the Lighthouse* was

written in 1926, when opportunities for women in the arts were opening up although painting still lagged far behind fiction. Woolf captures a woman painter at moments of breakthrough, not only into professionalism, but also into serious exploration of the emotional and intellectual possibilities of her art. Lily's growth as an artist coincides with the time in Woolf's career when she found it possible to synthesize her aesthetic and political views into a single narrative; that is, to espouse the notion of high art as consistent with a feminist viewpoint (White 107). However, Woolf's feminist stance in this novel is rather moderate, her growing anger at the world's injustice and brutality so prominent in her previous novels being replaced by a more mature, self-confident view of creativity and art. It seems that she has finally found that peace she needed to accomplish her artistic vision in reconciling Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay, the painter and the domestic artist, proving indirectly that no matter the "job", women always have had creative powers. As Christopher Reed and others have pointed out, "modernism was congenial to feminism and to women's art because the principles of modernism encouraged a certain detachment and inventiveness which tended to preclude older patriarchal conventions" (qtd. in White 107).

Resolving the female artists' conflict with the male muse: thinking back to Leslie Stephen

"The Lighthouse", the last section of the novel, starts with Lily Briscoe's reflection on the house and its inhabitants after Mrs. Ramsay's death. Lily feels lost and powerless; everything seemed pointless, just like Mr. Ramsay's snap at his children not being ready for their trip to the Lighthouse: "What's the use of going now?" (146). Sitting alone among the clean cups at the long table, Lily felt "cut off from other people, and able only to go watching, asking, wondering". She thinks: "how aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was" looking at her empty coffee cup. These questions reflect the post First World War chaos and shift of values which Virginia Woolf became a witness of, a historical period marked by the Modern stream of thought she faithfully represented in *A Room of One's Own* and in her essays. Lily Briscoe is also searching for something permanent, for something that would be equivalent to Mrs. Ramsays' moments of eternity she created during the dinner when the "Boeuf en Danube" was served. Depicted as a young inexperienced painter in "The Window", struggling with her lack of confidence and self esteem, Lily comes back in the last section of the book much better equipped. It is facing Mr. Ramsay, a symbol of the Victorian patriarchy that strengthens her faith in the value and power of art. When Mr. Ramsay "raised his head as he passed and looked straight at her, with his distraught wild gaze which was yet so penetrating" (146). In order to escape his "demand on her", Lily pretends to be drinking out of the empty coffee cup. She starts reflecting on his words "Perished. Alone" and feels that there were some "empty places" she wanted to bring together. This empty space could be Woolf's unsolved relationship with her past and more specifically, in this context, her attitude towards her father. In order to focus on filling that space, Lily "turned her back to the window" in order to avoid Mr. Ramsay seeing her, for she had to "escape somewhere, be alone somewhere" (147). This is the very same moment when she decides to go back to that unfinished picture which "had been knocking about in her mind all these years". Lily's being haunted by the image of her unfinished picture is a very accurate

metaphorical representation of Woolf's statement about the images of her parents which had been tormenting her before the novel was completed.

Lily fetches herself a chair, pitches her easel on the same spot she was standing ten years ago and tries to put together "the wall, the hedge, the tree" (147). According to Gliserman, Lily sees Mr. Ramsay as "intrusive and voracious-infantile" and the way she arranges her easel, a "barrier" however "frail", as a method to protect herself from Mr. Ramsay (123-124). However, she can not find that "relation between masses" which she "had borne in her mind all these years", as Mr. Ramsay was "bearing down on her"; every time he approached, Lily could not paint, as he was bringing with himself "chaos" and "ruin". This passage is reflecting Woolf's belief that her father was a threat to her creativity, to her freedom as a writer.

Greenacre (qtd in Kavaler-Adler 1993:61-2) mentions the figure of a female writer's father as one factor which can tip the scales in favor of creative strivings in women. Greenacre claims that female child's father can help mobilize creative strivings in his daughter, particularly if he himself is an artist. Gedo in "Portraits of an Artis" (1983) continues exploring this influence of the father's image, but in a negative way. He states that a father as an artist can become an obstacle for the daughter, because he might be envious. Gedo explains this by the fact that because of gender differences, a girl is a disadvantage to a boy, who would be seen as an extension with the father's own strivings for achievement and recognition. He believes that a father will feel more rivalry toward a daughter than toward a son, since he won't see his own glory reflected in a daughter (qtd in Kavaler-Adler 1993: 62). I will have to disagree with Gedo and argue that for Virginia Woolf, and particularly in *To the Lighthouse*, her relationship with Leslie Stephen, a man of letters himself, was rather a source of inspiration than a rivalry. After all, Leslie and Julia Stephen "did permit Vanessa and Virginia creative work. Vanessa was permitted art classes and Virginia was the writer. Her parents read the *Hyde Park Gate News* with apparent pleasure, despite its satirical edge. […] Virginia was well-stocked with serious, challenging material by her father, as is very evident in her earliest surviving diary, kept in 1897" (Scott 6). She did not have to prove to her father that she, too, was capable of achieving great success as a writer; Woolf explored her need to get her father's attention and approval, she needed his respect and recognition more than anybody else's.

Maze states that "Woolf's attitudes to her father, while strongly ambivalent, were largely unrepressed; the feelings of both affection and angry resentment towards him had ready access to consciousness, and are expressed freely" in *To the Lighthouse* (85). Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia Woolf describes her strong attachment to her father and writes of the time they spent exclusively together. "This was the time when Virginia could walk out with her father to the Loggan Rock of Trem Crom and the fairyland of great ferns which stood high above a child's head, or to Halestown Bog where the osmunds grew" (qtd. in Kavaler-Adler 32). Sir Leslie Stephen was not incapable of evoking loyalty and affection from his daughter. "I too felt his attractiveness," she writes in Moments of Being; " It arose-to name some elements at random-from his simplicity, his integrity, his eccentricity-by which I mean he would say exactly what he thought, however inconvenient and do what he liked. He had clear, direct feelings". Among "his obvious qualities," beyond the less attractive ones, were "his honesty, his unworldliness, his lovableness, his perfect sincerity" (111). The times when he called up in his children

the most passionate and positive feelings were for Virginia: "Beautiful, (…) simple and eager as a child; and exquisitely alive to all affection; exquisitely tender. We would have helped him then if we could, given him all we had, and felt it little beside his need-but the moment passed" ("Moments of Being" 46). Just like in the case of Mrs. Ramsay, ambivalence is at the heart of Woolf's feelings toward her father. But, as Van Buren explains it, " her portrait of Mr. Ramsay succeeds in presenting us with both his limited mind, his need for sympathy, his leechlike attachment to women, and his ill temper, as well as his honesty, sincerity, integrity, courage, and capacity for tenderness" (36).

Her deep attachment to her father when she was young (Panken 14), might have been changed after her mother's death. Rigid and tyrannical in his domestic situations, at times overly rational and also self-deprecating, Mr. Ramsay is depicted in his constant demand for sympathy and support. Some critics have claimed that Mrs. Ramsay's death and her husband's exploitation of his daughters after was in fact a reflection of Woolf's interpretation of what could have been the cause of her mother's death. Panken states that she might have blamed her father for his overexploitation of Julia Stephen; his inordinate need for her solicitousness might have killed her (15). This is supported by the vehement stream of thoughts going through Lily's head as she is trying to concentrate on her painting, but can not do so because of Mr.Ramsay's presence: "Mrs.Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died – and had left all of this"("To the Lighthouse"149). In *Refiguring Modernism*, Bonne Kime Scott claims that Virginia Woolf suffered "a second maternal loss" when her half-sister Stela Duckworth, who died because their father, Leslie Stephen was "ill suited for single parenthood and depended on his female relations" (6). Stella died soon after Julia Stephens as "an aftershock after their mother's death" when Virginia was fifteen. This resulted in Virginia "refusing to become the next victim of their father's tyranny" (Scott 6). The following pages describe in detail Lily's feelings toward Mr. Ramsay as an echo of Virginia's own unresolved anger and pain; "that man, [Lily] thought, her anger rising in her, never gave, that man took". She, on the other hand, "would be forced to give" (149).

Devastating in itself, Julia Stephen's death was not all that Virginia suffered at this time. Leslie Stephen "went into a period of pathological mourning, punctuated by bellowings of grief" (Dalsimer 6). It was a time Woolf would describe as "a period of Oriental gloom, for surely there was something in the darkened rooms, the groans, the passionate lamentations that passed the normal limits of sorrow, and hung about the genuine tragedy with folds of Eastern drapery" ("R" 40). Virginia, at the age of thirteen, as well as he siblings, had then to comfort their bereaved father, as he yielded to "self-dramatizing self pity" (Dalsimer 6). Looking back to those years, Woolf wrote: "The tragedy of her death was not that it made one, now and then and very intensely, unhappy. It was that it made her unreal; and us solemn, and self-conscious. We were made to act parts that we did not feel; to fumble for words that we did not know. It obscured, it dulled. It made one hypocritical and immersed in the conventions of sorrow" ("A Sketch of the Past" 95). Lily Briscoe's feelings toward Mr. Ramsay were also born out of Woolf's recalling of her father's colossal self-absorption, insatiable in his needs, bearing down coercively on his children and on any woman from whom he might extort sympathy after his wife's death. In what Spilka calls a "telling moment", Virginia Woolf presents in essence " the brutality of her father's rages, as she knew them in

overwhelming fullness after his wife's death, and the abasement of her mother's reverence for her truth-telling tyrant, which she had witnessed in childhood" (87).

I believe that the father-daughter conflict had also another cause – it was grounded in her father's social, political and artistic view of women as servants to men, a concept he inherited from the Victorian era. Van Buren claims that "the love Woolf felt for her father was real, but it was not her dominant feeling toward him, in part because his abusive behavior to the women in his life" (34). According to Oser, the father-daughter conflict is Woolf's artistic representation of the "philosophical generations clash in the name of truth", of the violence "against the establishment, from God on down the ladder of male hierarchy, through mother and family, and into the prison of human nature" (97). *To the Lighthouse* does indeed open with the image of James, a six-year-old boy, wishing he had some scissors in hand, "longing to stab his Victorian father" (Oser 97). In Maze's perspective, "Woolf's opposition to male chauvinism was a realistic response to the exploitation of her sex, but her feminism did not include a condemnation of maleness in general" (115). It is true that her view, expressed in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas,* was that "if men could be cured of their distorted attitude to women, they were capable of love and rationality-like her father. She wished it were possible to cancel out those aspects of his nature that conflicted with his sanity and kindness and prevented her from fully loving him. (Maze 115). It could be that Virginia Woolf wished her father were born on a different era, when women would have been treated differently and her father's attitude towards his wife and children would also have been different. Lily Brisco's bitterness is rather aimed at the general Victorian social convention of the status of women as inferior to men, which threatened her position as a female writer in the 1920s. This is why, as Lily becomes more confident in her artistic vision, Mr. Ramsay is depicted in warmer colors; the closer Virginia Woolf is to the symbolical ending of the novel: "I have had my vision", the most intimate the father-daughter relationship gets.

Van Buren writes about the feelings of "rage alternating with love" that defined Woolf's relation to her father (34). Woolf's need to see them in perspective, and understand both, lies behind much of the portrayal of Mr. Ramsay. The feeling of hatred and anger at her Victorian father must have been a great burden to Woolf herself – she need to somehow annihilate this animosity and reconcile with her father. She shared with Lily that shame and guilt of not being capable of consoling her father after her mother's death: "she was ashamed of herself" (153). As Lily suddenly realizes, when remembering "Mrs. Ramsay's face - into a rapture of sympathy" which conferred "the most supreme bliss of human nature was capable" (150), that forgiveness has the greatest possible power to heal and set free, Woolf finds a way out for herself. She felt, just like Lily Briscoe, when Mr. Ramsay told her about the trip to the Lighthouse: "such expeditions (…) are very painful" that she "could not" sustain this enormous weight of sorrow, support these heavy draperies of grief a moment any longer" (152). She understands that only by getting over her anger and forgiving her parents, her mother for dying abruptly and leaving her alone and her father for demanding too much of her, she could find peace, she could put that peace on the paper as an expression of her ultimate artistic vision.

As Mr. Ramsay was standing next to her, waiting for her sympathy, Lily "could say nothing" and was waiting for James and Cam to rescue her. Suddenly Mr. Ramsay notices that his boot-laces were untied. As a way to release all that tension, Lily exclaims: "what beautiful boots!" Even thought praising his boots when "he had asked her to solace his soul; when he had shown her his bleeding hands, his lacerated heart" made Lily feel "ashamed of herself", Mr. Ramsay smiled, as his "draperies, his infirmities fell from him" (153). As Van Buren notices, praising Mr. Ramsay's boots, which are his passion, his pride, a symbol of his practicality and ingenuity and of his moor-striding self, is to praise him (118). It is true that "giving what he demanded" did not come easily to Lily. She obviously lacks Mrs. Ramsay's feminine skills, as she describes herself a "peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid" (150), "a stock, stone" (151). Even though "unlike Mrs Ramsay, Lily has neither the compulsion nor the capacity to cater to the needs of all those who come into contact with her", she was able to overcome this "emotional deficiency" by capturing the vision she needed to capture on the canvas very essence of her memories and necessity to reunite with her father (Rosenthal 114). Her creation is made difficult precisely because of "her refusal to incorporate Mr Ramsay into the field of her sympathy, to see him not as a dissonant element, but as authentic part of the whole" (Rosenthal 114). In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf made it clear that "a sensibility irritated by grievance and dislike is not conductive to the creation of art" (qtd. in Rosenthal 115). Rosenthal believes that what she must learn to do is "precisely what Cam and James must learn to do on the sail to the Lighthouse with their father: to cease to "resist tyranny to the death" and learn to understand Mr Ramsay with the same kind of loving compassion demonstrated by Mrs Ramsay" (115).

In describing his boots, a symbol of all he represented as a man, as a father, as a man of letters, "sculptured, colossal", like "his own indisputability" (153), Mr. Ramsay was also trying to reach to her, to connect with her, to deserve her attention, her sympathy, her affection. When he "made her observe that she had never seen boots made quite that shape before", while lifting his right boot and holding it in the air, Lily felt that "they reached a sunny island where peace dwelt, sanity reigned and the sun for every one shone, the blessed island of good boots" (154). This moment marked Lily's reconciliation with Mr. Ramsay and therefore with her own pain and frustration, anger and grief: "her heart warmed to him" (154). By approaching Lily Briscoe in his own way, by showing her how to tie the laces on his boots, Mr. Ramsay overcomes his selfishness, his constant ignoring of other people's needs which Mrs. Ramsay found so outrageous in "The Window": "To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilization so wantonly, so brutally, was to her so horrible an outrage of human decency that, without replying, dazed and blinded, she bent her head as if to let the pelt of jagged hail, the drench of dirty water, bespatter her unrebuked" ("To the Lighthouse" 32).

Roberta White describes this moment as Lily's being "torn between her desire to paint and the demands of a male ego" (97). White claims that the ensuing "boot scene," in which Lily refuses to pour out sympathy for Mr. Ramsay but distracts and pleases him by praising his well-made boots, shows how much Lily " has grown in strength over the passing years" (97). By complimenting Mr. Ramsay in an indirect and comradely fashion, Lily is able to offer him some attention without giving in to his demands. As a

consequence-almost, it seems, as a reward for standing firm-her own small gesture evokes in her a genuine sympathy for him, a feeling based on common humanity rather than gender roles. She suddenly apprehends his loneliness: "There was no helping Mr. Ramsay on the journey he was going" (…). White argues that this scene is crucial, for, unlike the protagonists in earlier novels "who give in to male demand for attention and put down their paintbrushes, Lily draws upon her own wits to come upon a suitable compromise and get on with her work" (p. 98). Rosenthal states that the completion of Lily's canvas "coincides with her ability to think with genuine human warmth about Mr. Ramsay. [Bt the end of the novel] Lily moves to a state of active acceptance of Ramsay and all that he stands for. In doing so, the 'discomfort of the sympathy which she held undercharged' is assuaged, permitting her access to that incandescent imaginative state which had previously eluded her" (115).

Virginia Woolf had found a rather original approach to resolving the Victorian versus modernist conflict concerning the women artists' status. She transformed her frustration and anger in art material, she chose to forgive instead of hate, she got closer to her parents as an artist, a closeness possible only due to her artistic rebirth. As Lily gets more confident in her artistic abilities, she becomes stronger as a woman and accepts Mr. Ramsay the way he is, with all his faults and prejudices, not because he chose to, but because he, too, was a victim of the Victorian stereotype that "women can't paint, women can't write" (86).

Even if Lily Briscoe is generally treated as an opposite of Mrs. Ramsays, representing the Victorian woman versus the Modern artist, Weinstein claims that Lily is more like Mrs. Ramsay than she thinks or is aware of, as she starts seeing Mr. Ramsay "as other than threatening to her sense of self" (383). Alice van Van Buren also finds some affinity between the tow female characters when she states that Mr. Ramsay is transformed into a cheerful, kindly man, satisfied by her offering even if Lily answered his demand indirectly, because she "selected her own methods as wisely as Mrs. Ramsay", who once answered indirectly his demand that she say "I love you" by choosing the Lighthouse trip as "the proper subject with which to declare her affection, an appropriate symbol on that particular day" (117). Victorian or not, Mrs. Ramsay could still equip Lily with a set of valuable survival tools, more appropriately described as universal, than rather attributed to a specific political or social era.

Van Buren claims that the boots scene is "an addition to the draft, one effective in connecting Lily to both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay" (118). For Lily is reduced to tears when Mr. Ramsay stoops to tie her shoes just as Mrs. Ramsay, in one of her most moving moments with her husband, thinks, "She was not good enough to tie his shoe strings" (51) when he has just humbled himself before her. Having joined Mrs. Ramsay without giving up any of her own independence, Lily "has attained a sense of the range of her own abilities, a greater confidence in herself, realizing that a woman may be an artist and still appreciate and soothe a man" (Van Buren 118). So whereas she initially saw the Lighthouse trip from the point of view of James and blamed Mr. Ramsay for "coercing the spirits of his children", now she sees it more as Mrs. Ramsay would have, as a chance for connection, and feels annoyed with Cam and James for sulking and disappointing their father (118). Gliserman states that what allows Lily to resolve some of her feelings about Mr. Ramsay is her identification with him-as someone who works hard, as

someone who abstracts, and as someone who loved Mrs. Ramsay (129). She comes to realize that Mr. Ramsay, like herself, has doubts about the value of his work. She appreciates what he does. Having reached this moment of understanding, Lily will follow Ramsay's progress to the Lighthouse as she works on her painting; and she will complete her work simultaneous to his arrival there, thus bringing closure to her identification with him. Gliserman also claims that Lily sympathizes with Mr. Ramsay in their common grief for Mrs. Ramsay, whose loss she has not completely assimilated: "Her initial anger at Mr. Ramsay is a mirror of her own anger for being ungiving and unsympathetic. In a sense she is jealous of his grief, for it openly speaks to his dependency and his love. When Lily's anger shifts to sympathy, when she sees in Mr. Ramsay what is missing in herself-including his male center, "something bare, hard" –she can turn to reflect on her loss and complete her work" (129).

Abel claims that "Mr. Ramsay appears humble, not apparently engaged in any struggle, eager only to converse with his daughter" (66). According to Rosenthal, "it is Mr. Ramsay with his aggressive intellectualism and unyielding demands for pity whom Lily is unable to integrate, either emotionally or imaginatively, into her life" (114). I will argue, however, that in the boots scene Mr. Ramsay is depicted in a great effort to subdue his face and voice and "all the quick expressive gestures which had been at his command making people pity him and praise him all these years", which was no easy for him (167). His struggle is with his own character, his own prejudices against women and his Victorian ideology concerning female roles. Maze argues that Leslie Stephen's stereotype of sexes, his official morality often contradicted his personality and family behavior (114). Jean Love, on the evidence of Stephen's correspondence with his wife, presents a portrait of him as childishly, even hysterically dependent on Julia and indeed all women close to him. His demands for affection and sympathy over his health or the trials of his profession were insatiable. Many of these demands were couched in a way that made any adequate response impossible. Whatever his wife said to compensate in one direction would be made to appear slighting in another: "He would complain that his writing, and he himself, had failed.... When she praised his writing, he often replied that he complained of failure because he wanted her to pity him and be more affectionate, not because he wanted to hear he was a good writer". That is, "an expression of affection as well as of her actual opinion was rejected because the affection was not correctly directed" (qtd. in Maze 114).

In order for Woolf to accomplish her cathartic journey, she had to re-experience her feelings toward her father; she had to go back to her initial hatred and animosity to overcome them in the last section of the novel. In the boots scene, Mr. Ramsay is not the gloomy tyrant James hated so fiercely. He is not that selfish king demanding affection and sympathy and not giving anything back. In this scene Woof depicted him in much lighter colors – it could be that in doing so, in trying to remember the times when she was so much attached to him, when she loved him deeply, she was going to that pre-conflict times described in the first chapter. Lily's warming attitude toward Mr. Ramsay could be interpreted in this context as Woolf's own attempt to reconcile with her demons, to find compromise between pain and hope, between past and present, between hatred and love. For she needed to forgive, she needed to accept her past in order to move on – this was

necessary for Virginia the daughter, and she used it a brilliant device to help Virginia – the writer to lay on the paper her healing, her piece of mind.

Dalsimer describes Mr Ramsay as "the personification of Victorian patriarchal culture, and he bears the whole weight of that culture. He is a philosopher of some stature: the extent of his achievement, the measure of that stature, is his endless preoccupation" (10). In the description of her father in *A Sketch of the Past*, she sums up his strengths and limitations of his mind: "Give him a thought to analyze, the thought say of Mill or Bentham or Hobbes, and he is ... a model of acuteness, clarity, and impartiality. Give him a character to explain, and he is (to me) so crude, so elementary, so conventional that a child with a box of chalks could make a more subtle portrait" ("Moments of Being" 146). Van Buren argues that his "limit to the rational kept her father, as she saw him, from any appreciation of the aesthetic aspects of life that were so important to her" (34). He was, she says, "Spartan, ascetic, puritanical. He had I think no feeling for pictures; no ear for music; no sense of the sound of words" (68). In depicting the narrowness of his vision, his embodiment of a certain, limited, superrational temperament, she also feel she is too harsh in her portrait: "Undoubtedly I colour my picture too dark, and the Leslie Stephen whom the world saw in the eighties, and in the nineties until my mother died, must have been not merely a Cambridge steel engraving intellectual" ("Moments of Being" 113). By showing Lily his boots, by smiling at her and finally giving her the freedom and space she need to concentrate on the white easel, he "has ceased to threaten her sense of self" (Van Buren 118). In fact she has begun to see herself as he sees himself, standing out "on a narrow plank, perfectly alone, over the sea" (147). His passion and reason is philosophy; hers is painting; he is trying to reach the letter "R" and she is trying to put on the canvas her vision.

To the Lighthouse culminates with Mr. Ramsay reaching the Lighthouse and Lily Briscoe having her vision. The Ramsay family is reunited and Lily Briscoe realizes that she is not haunted by Mrs. Ramsay's statement "women must marry". As she matures as a painter Virginia Woolf is overcoming her anger and frustration caused by the fact that she didn't not fit into the generally accepted pattern of the woman's role in society and in the family life, and especially of the status of women as artists. Feminist scholars have claimed Woolf as one of their own, centering on the political or social feminism in "*A Room of One's Own"* and "*Three Guineas"*. By creating one of the most challenging novels of English Literature, Virginia Woolf had proved to herself and to readers that women can, indeed write, women can, indeed, paint. I tend to agree that Woolf's main theme is the worship of art as reflected in the female artist's struggle for self expression, rather than anything else, "To the Lighthouse" thus bringing new dimension the Woolf's feminism.

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